



## ANIMAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

Animal Health and Food Safety Services  
Animal Health Branch

### *Brucella melitensis* Detected in Goats in South Texas -December 1999-

#### What is *Brucella melitensis*?

*Brucella melitensis* (*B. melitensis*) is a bacteria that causes brucellosis in goats. It can also seriously affect the health of other livestock and people. In people, *B. melitensis* causes "brucellosis", also known as "Malta fever" or "undulant fever" and characterized by fever, weakness, weight loss, joint pain, and complications such as inflammation of the heart and nervous system. The disease is spread to people from infected animals, usually goats, through raw milk and dairy products (unpasteurized cheese), and contact with aborted kids or infective reproductive secretions. The disease is **not** spread from cooked meats or pasteurized milk products. People working with goats, such as veterinarians, abattoirs workers, and milkers, should always take precautions to prevent transmission of disease. Human-to-human transmission is extremely rare.

#### Where is the infection in Texas?

*B. melitensis* has been found in Starr County, in the Lower Valley of Southern Texas (shown on map). During the late summer of 1999, a cow was found that reacted to a routine brucellosis test at a livestock market. This cow was slaughtered and found to be infected with *B. melitensis*. Subsequent testing of the herd from which this cow originated revealed four other cattle suspected to be exposed to the infection. This herd was depopulated.

All susceptible livestock around the infected herd were tested for brucellosis, and an infected goat herd was found within 1/4 mile of the infected cattle herd. The infected cow had been bought from the infected goat facility about two years ago. The goat herd of 120 animals was tested and 15 animals reacted to the brucellosis blood test. When samples were cultured, *B. melitensis* was identified. The goat herd was depopulated. This herd was located about 30 miles from the Mexican border.

The source of the infection in Texas has not been determined, but is suspected to be from goats moving from Mexico. Mexico has recognized that brucellosis transmitted from goats to people is a significant public health problem, and is working hard to eradicate this disease.

#### What is Texas doing?



The Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC), the state's livestock health regulatory agency, is investigating the disease with assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Veterinary Services. Texas has about 1.4 million goats, but *B. melitensis* has not been diagnosed in Texas or the U.S. for a quarter century. The TAHC is testing all animals surrounding the affected herds and encouraging statewide voluntary testing for brucellosis; in 1999, 10,842 goats were tested. Texas is trying to find the source of

the infection and trace animals that have moved out of the herd to ensure that the disease has not spread to other animals.

The TAHC is educating livestock owners and the public about the risks associated with goats that may be infected with *B. melitensis*. They are advising ranchers to test animals before they add them to their herd. The Texas Department of Health has also notified physicians and public health clinics in South Texas to be alert for patients who may have contracted this form of brucellosis.

**Map showing the county in Texas where *B. melitensis* was found. The TAHC is doing intensive surveillance in the outlined counties.**



-  Target test zone near the infected goat herd.
-  Star county in Lower Valley South Texas, where the infected goat herd was located.

## What is California doing?

The California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) is continuously testing goats in routine surveillance and has not identified *B. melitensis* in them in more than 25 years. The CDFA is working closely with Texas to assess the risk of *B. melitensis* entering California in goats imported from Texas. California receives numerous goats from Texas, but at this time it does not appear that California receives goats from the affected area.

The CDFA is evaluating goats moving into California to determine if additional entry requirements are necessary. Importers are encouraged to contact the CDFA for additional information.

## For additional information call:

California Department of Food and Agriculture  
Animal Health Branch

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